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MALAVIKA

A PLAY BY KALIDASA RETOLD

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Script	Illustrations	Editor
Kamlesh Pandey	P.B.Kavadi	Anant Pai

Cover illustration by: C.M.Vitankar

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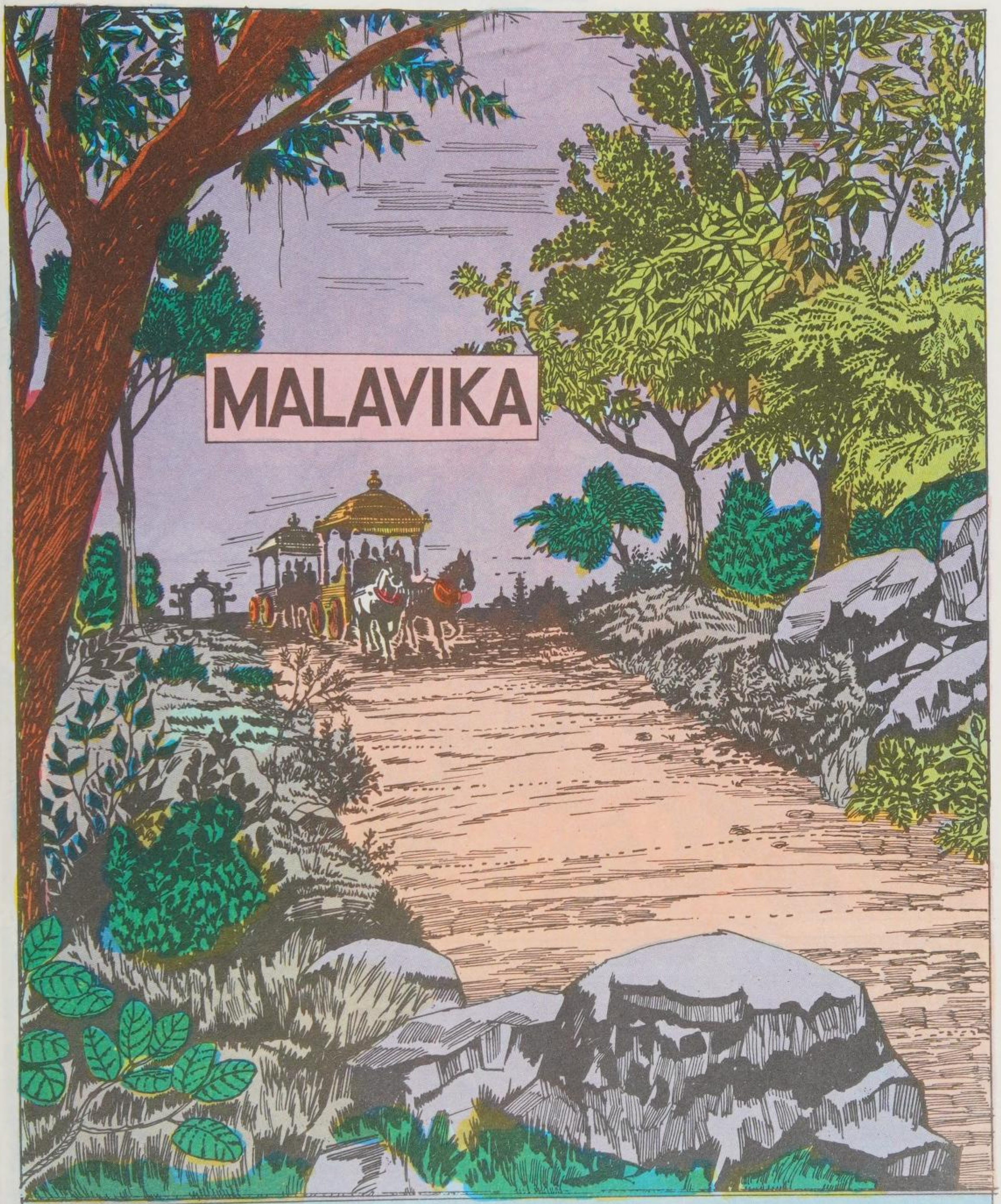
MALAVIKA



DURING THE SECOND CENTURY B.C. THE TWO COUSINS, YAJNASENA AND MADHAVASENA WERE ENGAGED IN A STRUGGLE FOR THE THRONE OF VIDARBHA. ONE DAY, AT DUSK, TWO CHARIOTS STOLE AWAY FROM VIDARBHA AND TOOK THE ROAD TO VIDISHA, A NEIGHBOURING KINGDOM RULED BY AGNIMITRA. ONE OF THE CHARIOTS CARRIED PRINCE MADHAVASENA; PRINCESS MALAVIKA, HIS SISTER; SUMATI, HIS MINISTER AND KAUSHIKI SUMATI'S SISTER; THE OTHER, THEIR ATTENDANTS.

AS THEY RODE ON –

I WISH I COULD FLY TO VIDISHA, SUMATI. UNTIL I SUCCEED IN MY MISSION, I'LL KNOW NO PEACE.

YOU WILL SUCCEED, MY LORD.

I WONDER WHAT KIND OF CITY VIDISHA IS, KAUSHIKI.

YOU'LL SEE FOR YOURSELF WHEN WE REACH THERE, MALAVIKA.

A LITTLE LATER, AS THEY TURNED A BEND IN THE ROAD, MADHAVASENA SUDDENLY STARTED.

SUMATI, DO YOU SEE THOSE MEN THERE?

I DO. THEY'RE SOLDIERS.

WAIT! THEY'RE BLOCKING THE ROAD, SUMATI. QUICK! GET OFF HERE WITH OUR SISTERS AND TREK THROUGH THE JUNGLE TOWARDS VIDISHA. GOD WILLING, WE'LL MEET THERE.

BUT, MY LORD, I CAN'T DESERT YOU!

GO. IT'S AN ORDER, SUMATI. AND REMEMBER MY MISSION. PROMISE THAT YOU'LL FULFIL IT, SHOULD ANYTHING HAPPEN TO ME.

I PROMISE, MY LORD!

WE CANNOT LEAVE YOU TO FACE THEM ALONE. THEY'LL KILL YOU. WE'D RATHER ALL DIE TOGETHER.

DON'T BE FOOLISH, MALAVIKA. I'LL BE ALL RIGHT. NOW DON'T WASTE ANY MORE TIME. GO.

A FEW MINUTES LATER–

WELCOME, MADHAVA-SENA. YAJNASENA, THE KING OF VIDARBHA, INVITES YOU TO BE HIS HONOURED GUEST...

...AT HIS PRISON CELL.

AND THE SOLDIERS MARCHED AWAY WITH MADHAVASENA, HIS CHARIOTS AND HIS ATTENDANTS.

COME, MY CHILD. I SEE A CARAVAN MOVING TOWARDS VIDISHA. WE'LL JOIN THEM.

CONTROLLING THEIR EMOTIONS, THE THREE TREKKED WITH THE CARAVAN.

WHEN NIGHT FELL—

WE'LL HALT NOW, MY FRIEND. WE'LL MOVE ON AGAIN TOMORROW MORNING.

SUMATI, KAUSHIKI AND MALAVIKA TRIED TO RELAX BUT THEIR HEARTS WERE HEAVY.

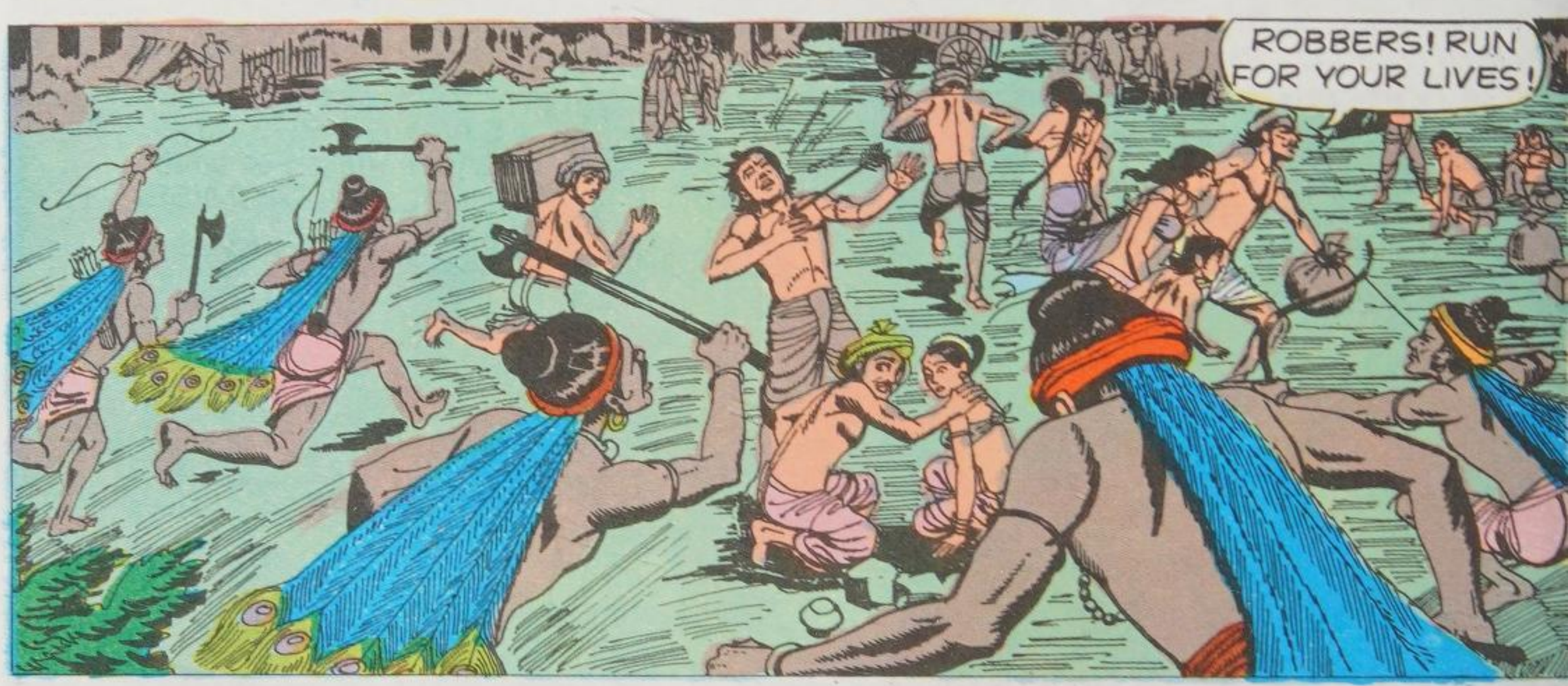
WHAT DOES FATE HAVE IN STORE FOR ME?

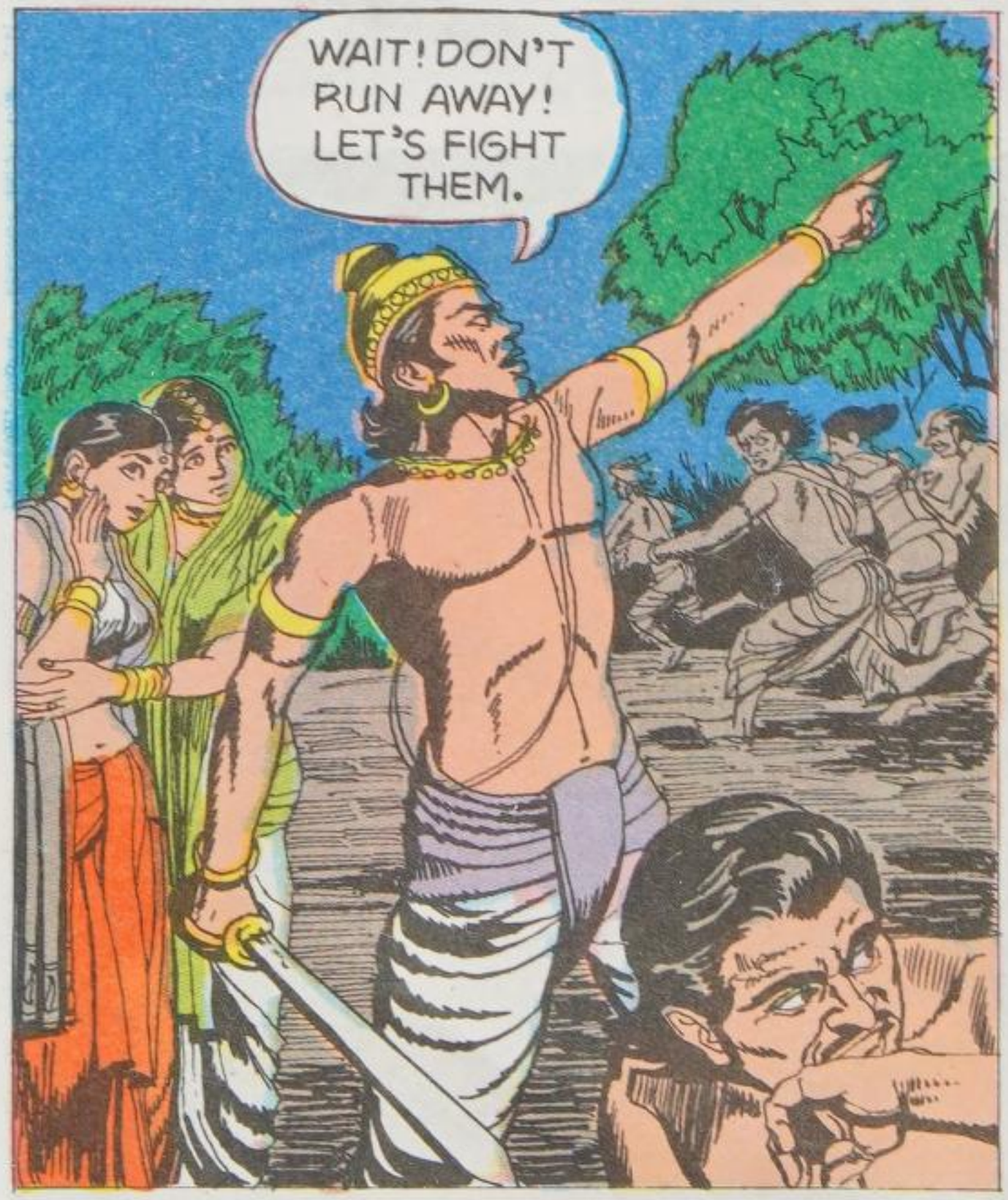
I CANNOT REST TILL I REACH VIDISHA AND FULFIL MY PROMISE.

SUDDENLY—

WHAT IS THIS? WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

AHHH!!


ROBBERS! RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!


WAIT! DON'T RUN AWAY! LET'S FIGHT THEM.

GO, HIDE SOMEWHERE. AS LONG AS I'M ALIVE, NOTHING WILL HAPPEN TO EITHER OF YOU. I'LL FIGHT THEM SINGLE-HANDED, IF NECESSARY.

SUMATI PUT UP A BRAVE FIGHT.

AHHH!

A FEW OTHERS FROM THE CARAVAN JOINED HIM BUT THE ROBBERS PROVED TO BE STRONGER.

LET'S FLEE! WE CAN'T MATCH THEM!

WHEN THE JUBILANT ROBBERS LEFT WITH THEIR BOOTY, KAUSHIKI CAME OUT FROM BEHIND SOME BUSHES.

NO! SUMATI, MY DEAR, DEAR BROTHER! SPEAK TO ME. ALAS! WHAT WILL I DO NOW? POOR MALAVIKA...

MALAVIKA! WHERE'S MALAVIKA? OH LORD, EITHER THE ROBBERS HAVE TAKEN HER AWAY...OR ...I SHUDDER TO THINK.

I'VE LOST MY BROTHER BUT I MUST NOT LOSE HEART. I MUST FIND MALAVIKA.

AS THE FLAMES LICKED THE BODY OF HER BROTHER, KAUSHIKI'S DETERMINATION GREW STRONGER.

SUMATI, YOU HAVE GONE BUT I WILL FULFIL THE PROMISE YOU MADE TO THE PRINCE. I MUST FIRST FIND MALAVIKA, HOWEVER.

MEANWHILE, IN A FOREST NEAR THE FRONTIERS OF VIDISHA—

WHO IS SHE?

SHE'S UNCONSCIOUS!

SHE LOOKS STARVED!

WHAT WAS SHE DOING HERE ALL ALONE IN THIS FOREST?

LET'S TAKE HER TO OUR COMMANDANT, VIRASENA.

VIRASENA, FRONTIER COMMANDANT OF VIDISHA, TOOK CHARGE OF THE GIRL.

WATCH OVER HER AND INFORM ME AS SOON AS SHE COMES TO.

A LITTLE LATER—

SIR, SHE'S OPENED HER EYES!

WHO ARE YOU, GENTLE MAIDEN? WHERE DO YOU...

MY NAME IS MALAVIKA. PLEASE DO NOT ASK ME ANYTHING ELSE.

AS YOU WISH. I WILL TAKE YOU TO OUR QUEEN. YOU WILL BE SAFE WITH HER.

VIRASENA TOOK MALAVIKA TO DHARINI, AGNIMITRA'S CHIEF QUEEN.

IT'S GOOD THAT YOU BROUGHT HER HERE, VIRASENA. SHE SHALL BE MY OWN MAID. I'LL SEND HER TO GANADASA TO LEARN DANCING.

THUS THE TURN DESTINY TOOK FINALLY LANDED MALAVIKA IN THE PALACE AT VIDISHA, HER DESTINATION, BUT IN A ROLE SHE HAD NEVER DREAMT OF.

A FEW DAYS LATER—

A FEMALE MENDICANT WISHES TO SEE HER MAJESTY. MAY I BRING HER IN?

LEAD THE REVERED ONE IN.

AS SOON AS KAUSHIKI ENTERED—

MALAVIKA! HERE! OH, HOW RELIEVED I AM! BUT I MUST NOT DISCLOSE HER IDENTITY. I MUST WAIT FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT.

IT'S KAUSHIKI! DISGUISED AS A MENDICANT!

I'M HONOURED TO HAVE YOU WITH US, PARIVRAJIKA.*

MAY GOD BLESS YOU, NOBLE QUEEN.

AS DHARINI TURNED TO GIVE THE MAID ORDERS...

...KAUSHIKI AND MALAVIKA MADE A SILENT PACT.

* A FEMALE MENDICANT

ONE DAY, WHILE HE WAS ADMIRING THE PAINTINGS IN THE PICTURE-HALL WITH QUEEN DHARINI, AGNIMITRA'S EYES CAUGHT SIGHT OF A STRANGE BUT BEAUTIFUL FACE.

WHO IS THIS GIRL, MY QUEEN? I'VE NEVER SEEN HER BEFORE.

JUST ONE OF MY MAIDS.

WHAT'S HER NAME?

I DON'T KNOW!

DHARINI'S YOUNG SISTER VASULAXMI, ANSWERED HIS QUESTION

I KNOW! I KNOW! IT'S MALAVIKA.

THE NAME STUCK IN HIS MEMORY. AND SO DID THE FACE. THAT NIGHT AGNIMITRA COULDN'T SLEEP.

MALAVIKA. WHAT A BEAUTIFUL NAME! WHAT A FACE...! I MUST SEE HER IN PERSON.

THE NEXT DAY, HE SENT FOR GAUTAMA, HIS VIDUSHAKA*.

GAUTAMA, I NEED YOUR HELP. I SAW MALAVIKA'S PORTRAIT, ACCIDENTALLY, AND NOW, I CRAVE TO SEE HER.

THAT'S EASILY DONE, MY LORD.

BUT HOW?

YOU ARE CLEVER INDEED, GAUTAMA!

WELL, MAY I TAKE YOUR LEAVE NOW? THERE'S WORK TO BE DONE.

* KING'S JESTER.

GAUTAMA FIRST WENT TO GANADASA.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT HARADATTA, YOUR RIVAL, HAS BEEN SAYING ABOUT YOU AT COURT? HE SAYS, 'AS A DANCE-TEACHER, GANADASA IS NOT EQUAL EVEN TO THE DUST OF MY FEET.'

DID HE SAY THAT? I MUST COMPLAIN TO HIS MAJESTY. I WILL NOT TOLERATE THIS INSULT. I WILL GO RIGHT NOW.

LATER, AT HARADATTA'S HOUSE —

I SHOULDN'T MENTION THIS BUT SINCE I'M YOUR WELL-WISHER, I CAN'T HELP IT. GANADASA HAS BEEN SAYING THAT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIM AND YOU IS AS GREAT AS BETWEEN THE OCEAN AND A PUDDLE.

I WILL SHOW THAT 'OCEAN' WHAT A 'PUDDLE' I AM. I'M GOING TO HIS MAJESTY RIGHT AWAY.

AT AGNIMITRA'S PALACE —

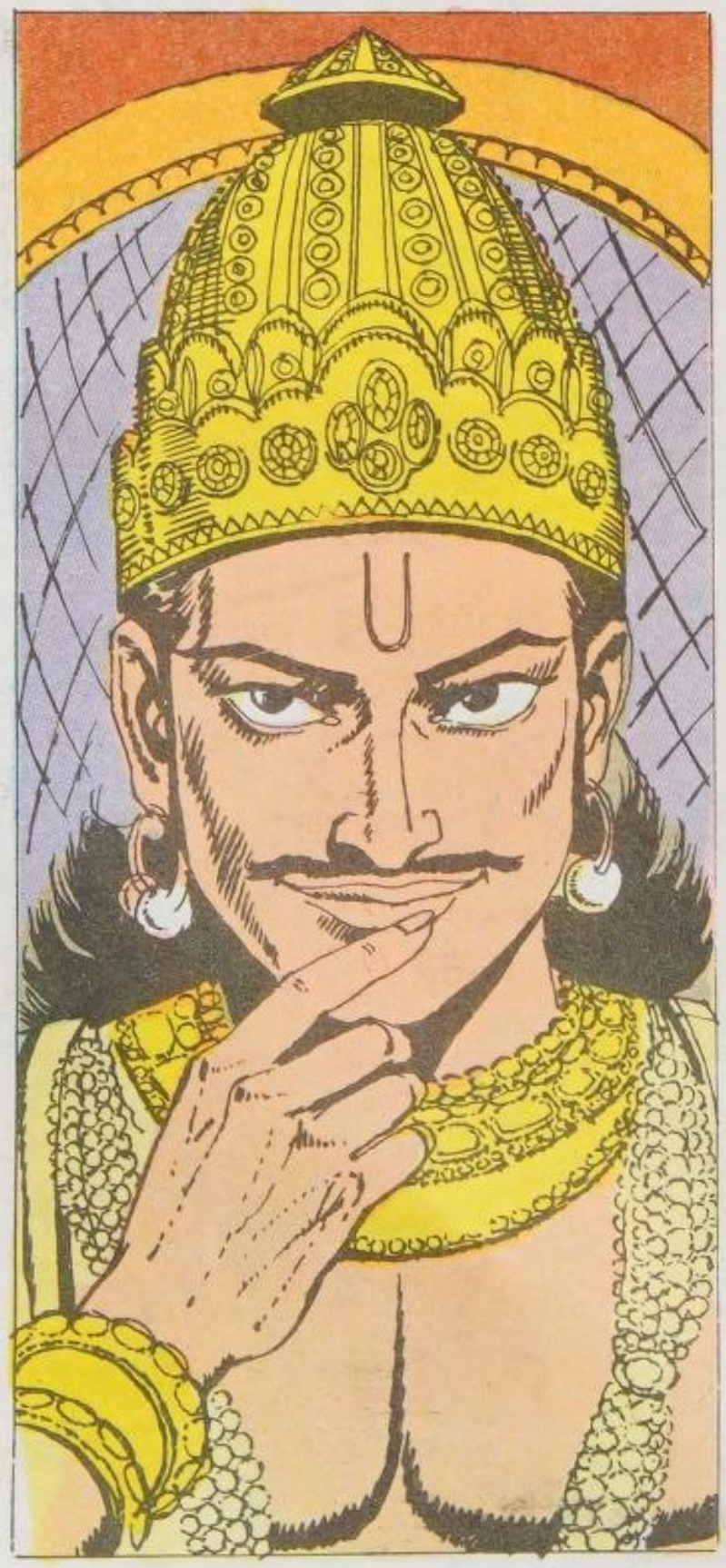
JUSTICE, YOUR MAJESTY! I HAVE BEEN INSULTED BY THIS HARADATTA.

HE BEGAN IT, YOUR MAJESTY! LET THERE BE A FAIR TRIAL OF OUR TALENTS, AND THE MATTER BE SETTLED.

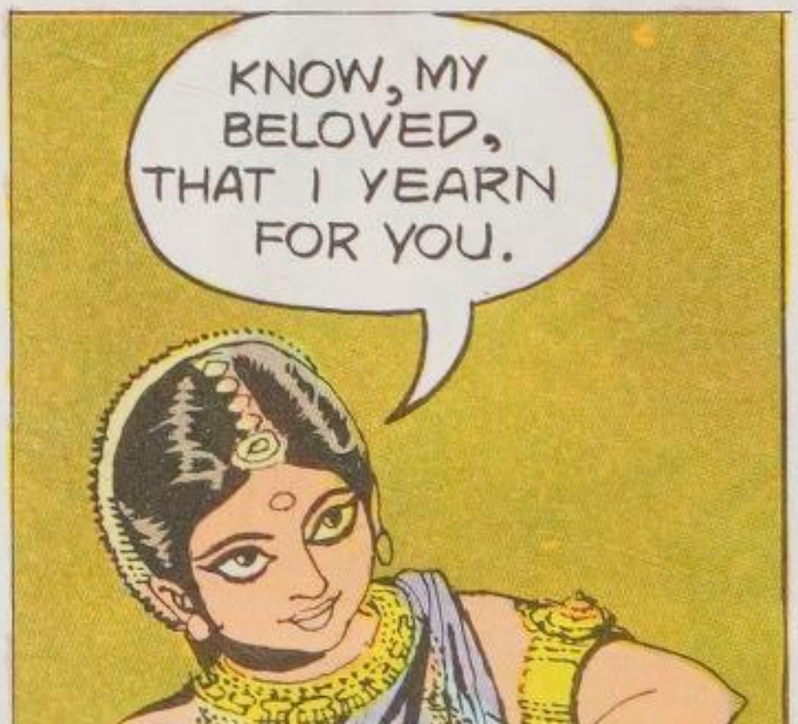
PEACE, MY GOOD MEN! THE TRIAL SHALL BE HELD.

A CONTEST WAS ARRANGED. KAUSHIKI WAS SELECTED TO JUDGE THE PERFORMANCES. GANADASA'S PUPIL, MALAVIKA, WAS THE FIRST TO PERFORM.

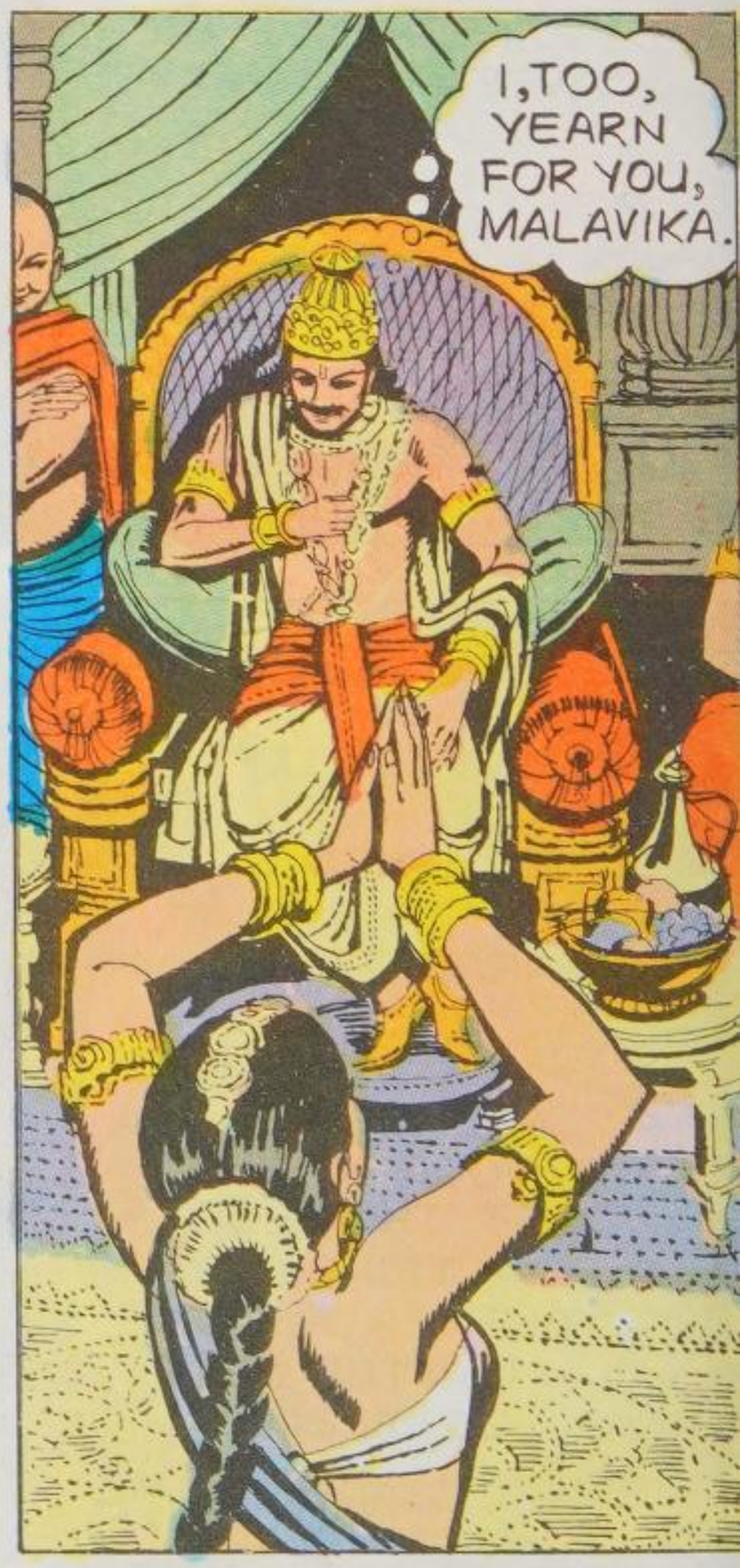
MY BELOVED IS HERE. YET HOW CAN I APPROACH HIM? WHAT A HOPELESS LOVE IS MINE!



KNOW, MY BELOVED, THAT I YEARN FOR YOU.



I, TOO, YEARN FOR YOU, MALAVIKA.



THE WORDS OF THE SONG EXPRESSED MALAVIKA'S OWN FEELINGS.

WHEN THE PERFORMANCE CAME TO AN END —

IT WAS PERFECT!

CONGRATULATIONS, GANADASA!

IT'S MEALTIME NOW. SHOULDN'T WE POSTPONE HARADATTA'S TURN FOR TOMORROW?

YOU ARE RIGHT, GAUTAMA.

WHAT DO YOU SAY, HARADATTA?

AS YOU WISH, YOUR MAJESTY.

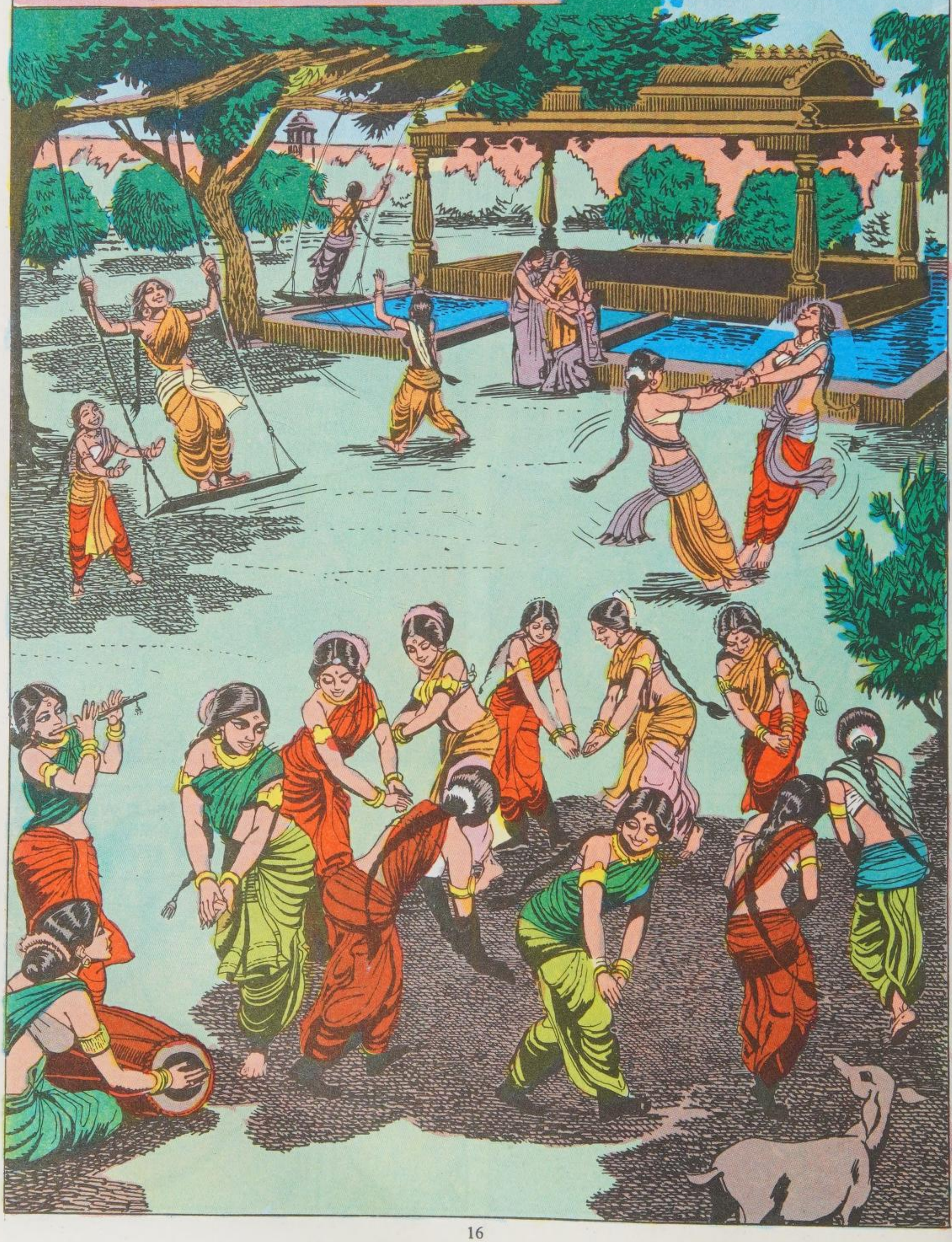
NOW WHAT, GAUTAMA? I'M MORE RESTLESS THAN EVER ...

FIRST LET ME EAT.

I CAN'T WAIT TO MEET HER, MY FRIEND.

PATIENCE, MY LORD, YOU SHALL... VERY SOON.

A FEW DAYS LATER, THE PALACE GARDENS RESOUNDED WITH LAUGHTER AS THE WOMEN OF THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD, BATHED IN THE FRAGRANCE OF FRESH BLOSSOMS, CELEBRATED THE SPRING FESTIVAL.



DHARINI TOO WAS THERE, WITH MALAVIKA ATTENDING ON HER. SUDDENLY, GAUTAMA CAME UPON THE SCENE.

LET ME PUSH OUR NOBLE QUEEN FOR A WHILE, MALAVIKA.

HELP! I'M SLIPPING!

DHARINI LANDED WITH A THUD.

O GAUTAMA, HOW CARE-LESS OF YOU! I'VE TWISTED MY ANKLE!

I'M SORRY, YOUR MAJESTY !...!...

JUST AS I EXPECTED.

ENOUGH, ENOUGH! NOW I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO FUL-FIL THE LONGING OF THE GOLDEN ASHOKA.* MALAVIKA, YOU TRY. IF THE ASHOKA BLOSSOMS WITHIN FIVE DAYS, I'LL GRANT YOU A BOON.

*A TREE WHICH WOULD BLOSSOM ONLY IF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN STRUCK IT WITH A DECORATED FOOT.

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MEANWHILE, IRAVATI, AGNIMITRA'S SECOND WIFE, SENT HIM A GIFT OF RED ASHOKA BLOSSOMS ALONG WITH AN INVITATION

I WISH TO ENJOY MY LORD'S COMPANY ON THE SWING.

ACCEPT IT, YOUR MAJESTY. IT SUITS MY PLAN.

IN AGNIMITRA'S PALACE GARDEN-

HERE WE ARE, FRIEND. LOOK! SPRING HAS TOUCHED EVERYTHING. NOW WHERE IS HER LADYSHIP?

PATIENCE, YOUR MAJESTY. BAKULAVALIKA, THE MAID, HAS PROMISED TO DO HER BEST.

AH! THERE SHE IS! OH, MALAVIKA!

HUSH, YOUR MAJESTY. LET US CREEP BEHIND THAT BUSH AND WATCH HER.

ALAS! I AM SICK WITH YEARNING FOR THE KING. BUT HOW CAN I SPEAK OF IT? WHY HAVE I COME HERE?

MALAVIKA, COME. LET ME APPLY THE RED DYE ON YOUR FEET. REMEMBER, YOU HAVE TO STRIKE THE ASHOKA TREE.

UH? OH! YES!

THERE! YOUR FOOT LOOKS LIKE A THOUSAND-PETALLED LOTUS. YOU DESERVE TO BE A QUEEN.

MY FRIEND, YOU ARE TALKING NON-SENSE.

I'VE SAID WHAT HAD TO BE SAID.

YOU MUST LOVE ME DEARLY, MY FRIEND.

I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE, MALAVIKA. THE KING TOO, LOVES YOU.

NO, IT CAN'T BE TRUE!

IT IS. HIS HEART ACHES TO TELL YOU WHAT I HAVE JUST SAID.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE QUEEN?

DON'T WORRY. I'LL HELP YOU. NOW STRIKE THIS GOLDEN ASHOKA WITH YOUR BEAUTIFUL FEET SO THAT IT CAN BLOSSOM.

I WISH I WERE THE ASHOKA TREE!

LET'S MAKE OURSELVES VISIBLE NOW. THIS IS THE MOMENT.

THAT WAS THE MOMENT INDEED.

WILL YOU FULFIL MY LONGING TOO, MALAVIKA?

AGNIMITRA'S QUERY WAS ANSWERED. BUT NOT BY MALAVIKA.

IT WAS IRAVATI, WHO, UNSEEN BY THEM, HAD WITNESSED THE WHOLE SCENE.

FULFIL, DO FULFIL HIS LONGING, MALAVIKA.

FALL AT HER FEET. THERE'S NO OTHER WAY OUT.

FORGIVE ME, IRAVATI. I HAVE NO INTEREST WHATSOEVER IN THE MAID. I WAS JUST AMUSING MYSELF AS YOU WERE LATE.

THESE ARE NOT MALAVIKA'S FEET WHICH WOULD FULFIL YOUR LONGING BY THEIR TOUCH.

LATER, IRAVATI TOLD DHARINI WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

SUCH AUDACITY MUST NOT GO UNPUNISHED. TAKE THEM TO THE TREASURE-CELLAR. AND REMEMBER, THEY MUST NOT BE RELEASED UNTIL YOU ARE SHOWN THE SEAL OF MY RING.

IN THE CELLAR —

NOW WHAT, BAKULA? WILL WE HAVE TO SPEND THE REST OF OUR LIVES HERE?

NO, MY FRIEND. IF I KNOW THE VIDUSHAKA, WE'LL SOON BE OUT. AND YOU'LL BE SPEND-ING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE WITH THE KING.

BAKULAVALIKA WAS RIGHT. THE KING WAS VISITING THE INJURED DHARINI WHEN—

HELP! HELP! I'VE BEEN BITTEN BY A SNAKE.

I HAD GONE TO PICK FLOWERS FOR THE QUEEN WHEN IT BIT ME. AH! I'M DYING... PLEASE LOOK AFTER MY AGED MOTHER...

ALAS! I'VE BECOME THE CAUSE OF HIS DEATH!

THE VAID!* WILL SOMEONE TAKE HIM TO THE VAID?

GOOD BYE, YOUR LADYSHIP.

* PHYSICIAN

GAUTAMA WAS CARRIED AWAY. A LITTLE LATER—

HERE, TAKE MY RING WITH THE SERPENT-SEAL. BUT RETURN IT TO ME AND NONE ELSE.

VICTORY TO THE KING! THE VAID NEEDS SOMETHING HAVING THE IMAGE OF A SNAKE.

WITHIN MOMENTS, GAUTAMA, WHO WAS ONLY PRETENDING, WAS AT THE DOOR OF THE TREASURE-CELLAR WITH THE RING.

THE KING HAS ORDERED THE RELEASE OF THE PRISONERS, MALAVIKA AND BAKULAVALIKA. HERE'S THE QUEEN'S RING.

LATER IN THE GARDEN—

YOU TWO WAIT HERE. I'M GOING TO BRING THE KING.

YOUR MAJESTY, COME WITH ME. QUICK!

AS SOON AS AGNIMITRA SAW MALAVIKA—

COME, COME TO ME, DEAR ONE.

BUT THE QUEEN! I'M AFRAID OF THE QUEEN.

FEAR NOT, DEAR ONE. FEAR NOT.

I SAW THE BRAVE KING IN VERY MUCH THE SAME STATE AS I AM - BEFORE THE QUEEN.

SUDDENLY—

I'M SORRY IF I'VE DISTURBED YOU.

SHE ONLY CAME TO THANK ME FOR RELEASING HER.

BEFORE IRAVATI COULD SAY ANOTHER WORD-

YOUR MAJESTY, YOUR MAJESTY, PRINCESS VASULAXMI IS UNCONSCIOUS. SHE WAS FRIGHTENED BY A MONKEY.

I MUST RUSH TO HER.

MALAVIKA AND BAKULA WERE LEFT ALONE.

WHAT NOW! WHEN I THINK OF THE QUEEN, I TREMBLE.

TAKE HEART, MALAVIKA. LOOK! THE ASHOKA HAS BURST INTO BLOOM.

EVEN BEFORE THE LAPSE OF FIVE NIGHTS!

AND THE QUEEN IS ONE WHO KEEPS A PROMISE, MALAVIKA!

WHEN DHARINI HEARD THE GOOD NEWS—

REQUEST MY LORD TO MEET ME BY THE FLOWERING TREE. TOGETHER WE SHALL WITNESS THE SPLENDOUR OF THE BLOSSOMS.

AS AGNIMITRA AND GAUTAMA WAITED BY THE TREE FOR DHARINI –

SO, EVEN THE GOLDEN ASHOKA HAS BLOSSOMED. WILL THE SPRING LEAVE ONLY MY LOVE UNFULFILLED?

NOT FOR MUCH LONGER, MY LORD. LOOK THERE!

AND WHEN AGNIMITRA LOOKED, HE COULDN'T BELIEVE HIS EYES.

MALAVIKA IN BRIDAL FINERY! I WONDER WHAT THE QUEEN'S INTENTIONS ARE?

I KNOW WHY THE QUEEN HAS BROUGHT ME HERE DECKED OUT AS A BRIDE. YET I AM NERVOUS.

JUST AS DHARINI TURNED TO TAKE ONE LAST LOOK AT MALAVIKA BEFORE ADDRESSING THE KING...

...A MESSENGER BURST UPON THE SCENE. A GREAT DEAL HAD HAPPENED AT VIDISHA'S FRONTIER. KING YAJNASENA HAD BEEN DEFEATED AND MADHAVASENA LIBERATED.

TWO MAIDS PRESENTED BY THE NEW KING OF VIDARBHA AWAIT YOUR MAJESTY'S PLEASURE.

YOU MAY SEND THEM TO ME.

WHEN THE MAIDS CAME—

VICTORY TO THE KING! VICTORY TO THE QUEEN!

AND WHAT MAY YOUR SPECIAL TALENTS BE?

LORD! WE ARE WELL-VERSED IN MUSIC.

MY QUEEN, TAKE ANY ONE OF THESE TWO.

MALAVIKA, WHICH ONE WOULD YOU LIKE?

THE NAME SURPRISED THE MAIDS AS MUCH AS THEIR REACTION SURPRISED AGNIMITRA.

OUR PRINCESS! ALIVE!

MALAVIKA! OH, PRINCESS! VICTORY TO THE PRINCESS.

HOW DO YOU KNOW MALAVIKA?

SHE'S THE SISTER OF PRINCE MADHAVASENA, WHO WAS ARRESTED BY YAJNASENA'S SOLDIERS. WE, TOO, WERE ARRESTED WITH HIM AND BROUGHT TO VIDARBHA.

MALAVIKA, A PRINCESS! AND I TREATED HER LIKE A MAID!

AND MALAVIKA? HOW DID SHE REACH HERE?

WE DO NOT KNOW, YOUR MAJESTY.

I KNOW! I'LL TELL YOU.

IT WAS KAUSHIKI.

THE NOBLE KAUSHIKI!

YES, THE MOMENT HAS COME TO TELL ALL. BEFORE MADHAVASENA WAS CAPTURED HE URGED SUMATI, MY BROTHER, TO FLEE WITH MALAVIKA, YOUR BETROTHED, AND ME, TO VIDISHA. ON THE WAY...

AS KAUSHIKI ENDED HER TALE—

WELL, THAT'S ANOTHER STORY.

BUT WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL US ALL THIS EARLIER?

WHEN MALAVIKA WAS A CHILD, IT WAS PROPHESIED THAT SHE WOULD GO THROUGH THE STATUS OF A SERVANT FOR ONE YEAR. THEN SHE WOULD MARRY A KING.

THAT'S WHY I KEPT THE SECRET FOR A WHOLE YEAR.

YOU DID WELL, TO KEEP THE SECRET.

THEN SHE MUST MARRY A KING!

MY LORD, PLEASE ACCEPT MALAVIKA AS YOUR BRIDE.

AS YOU COMMAND, MY QUEEN.

THUS WERE AGNIMITRA AND MALAVIKA UNITED FOR EVER.

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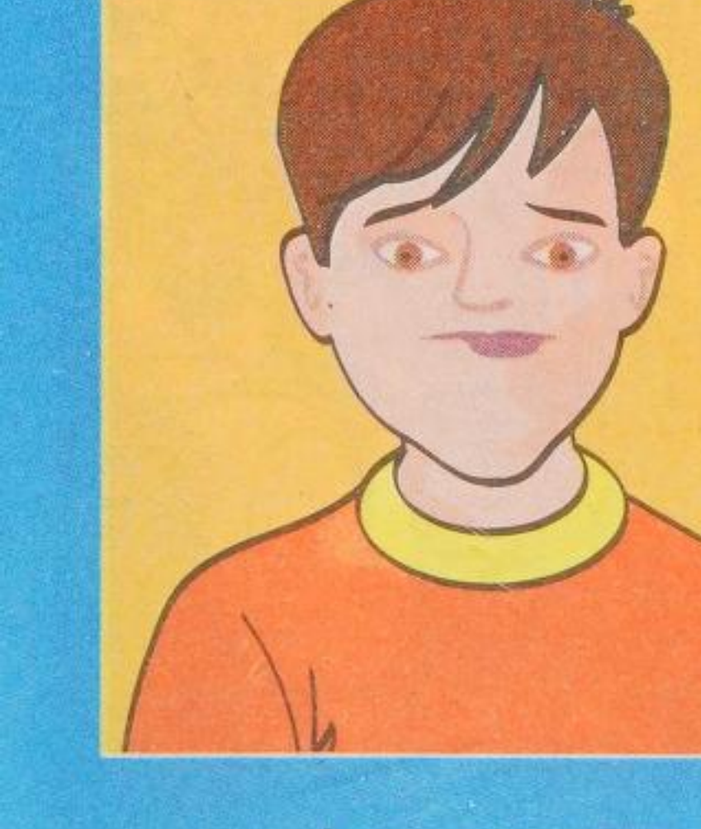

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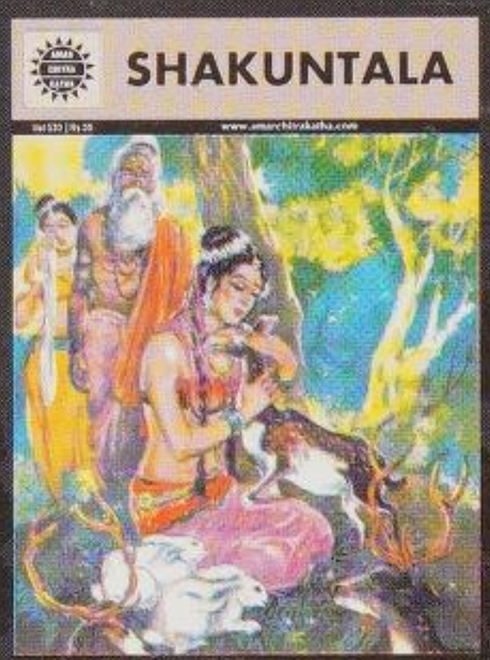

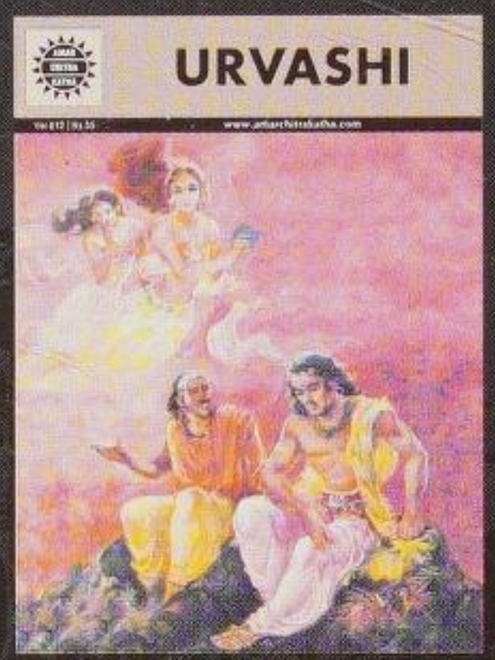

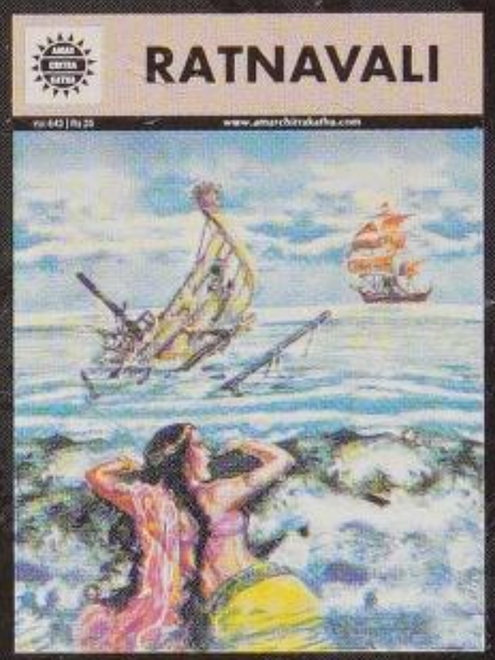

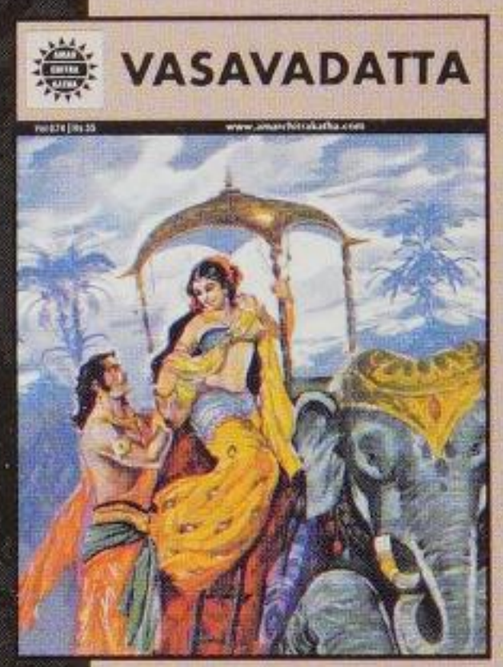

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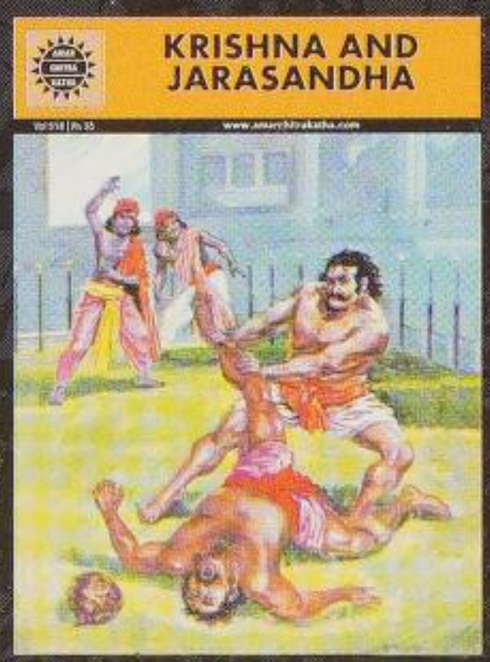

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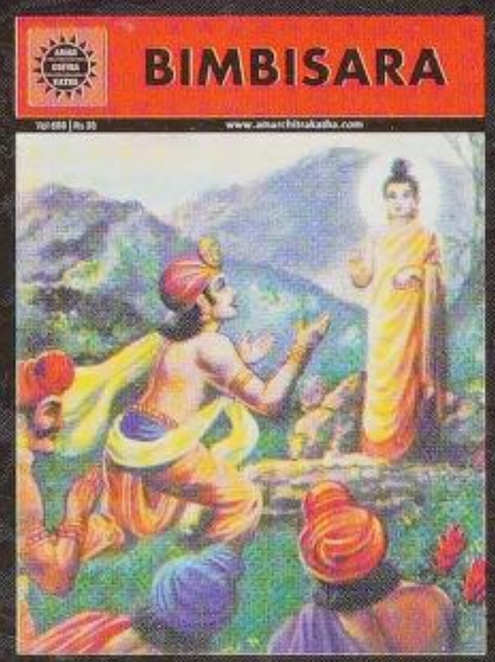

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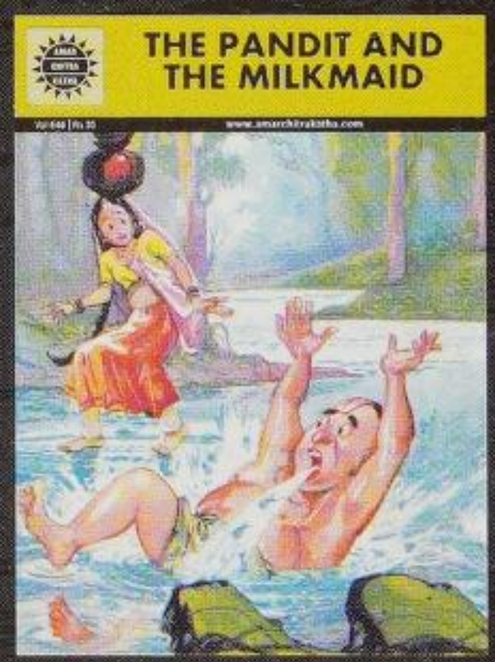

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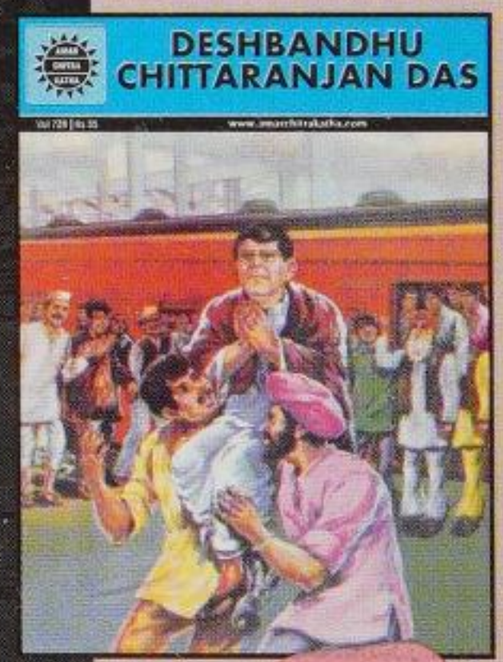

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"Amar Chitra Kathas are a glorious tribute to India's rich cultural heritage. These books have been an integral part of my children's early years, as they have been for many other families across India. Comics are a great way of reaching out to children, inculcating reading habits and driving their quest to learn more about our roots."

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